

## EDITORIALS

### Admiral of the Covert Seas

We mustn't through oversight overlook the overview—as we consider the bureaucratic words of the new chief of the intelligence community on its mission, role and function (*Face the Nation*, CBS, March 20).

The above concoction of clichés suggests the tone taken by Admiral Stansfield Turner as he discussed what he's up to as this country's superspy. But the substance of what he said is no laughing matter. It came from the chilliest days of the cold war, and was crammed with political judgment and advice that should be none of that exalted functionary's business, whether or not he sports an admiral's gold braid. Beyond that, his words boldly flew in the face of what President Carter has said on the subject, and contravened the national consensus against the excesses of the spy agencies, which seems to have been one healthy byproduct of Watergateism.

There has been a distressing tendency on the part of recent CIA directors to "sell" the image of the "intelligence community" to the American people. Beginning with William Colby, the attempt has been to make it seem like your friendly neighborhood snoopers—one recalls J. Edgar Hoover's "This Is Your FBI" and other media hypes the late FBI boss encouraged to make the federal bloodhounds more lovable. It would be much better if the spy agencies, foreign and domestic, were kept on a short leash in their dark closets, altogether removed from the business of public relations. But that is not the way we do things these days and there was the skipper of the CIA smiling away like any other TV celebrity on a quiz show.

Admiral Turner was, naturally, vague on specific operational matters—would CIA data on Korean bribery of Congressmen be made available to prosecutors, if it came to that; to what extent are Cubans involved in the Zaire affair? But he was quite outspoken on matters of high policy which should, in fact, be none of his business.

For instance, he offered the judgment that the world's "military balance is gradually eroding toward the Soviet side." He made that statement, or estimate, after declaring that "the will and resolve of the people of the United States is too great to permit" the Russians to become the dominant power in the world. We would have to "strengthen ourselves" in various ways, he said, but that did not necessarily mean "a massive new military program," as one of his questioners put it.

On the matter of strategic arms limitation, clearly a high priority item on President Carter's list, Admiral Turner threw a rather dark shadow. He remarked that "my job, as I see it, is to advise whether we can verify what is agreed," and that it is up to "the ingenuity of the intelligence community in being able to let us go ahead with arms negotiations." It is not hard to imagine the grilling Turner will be subjected to by the likes of Senator Jackson on whether he is triple-plated positive that the Russians cannot inch ahead of us in some category of arms, despite any treaty provisions. And it is not paranoid to suspect that in his new role Admiral

Turner may be unable to shed the military's ingrained disposition always to want more and yet more of everything.

On another aspect of the intelligence business—sanctions against those who "leak" our secrets—Turner seemed curiously out of sync with the President. Civil penalties for those who "release" unauthorized information, as Turner oddly phrased it, is all Carter has said he wants. The new CIA chief, however, said he "was amenable to studying amendments to the legislation which would have criminal sanctions." Press and public will be interested to learn whether this is just a clumsy inadvertence or a policy Turner will fight for within the federal bureaucracy. His remark that he does not "advocate an Official Secrets Act in the British form" hardly dispels the specter of that dreadfully repressive law.

What stands out in this interview with the new boss of the CIA is that very little has changed in the habits and attitudes of the "intelligence community." Despite all the errors, illegalities and scandals of the past, Turner seems to represent that bad old tradition with changes so slight that they can scarcely be called reforms. He talks about a "delicate oversight procedure" (which would make a horse laugh, delicately) and the "three very distinguished senior gentlemen" who theoretically keep a watch on the activities of our enormous spy apparatus (that board, appointed by Gerald Ford, is composed of Robert Murphy, Léo Cherne and a retired general), but one is left with the impression that those delicate old gentlemen are really there to make sure that the dirty work is carried out according to protocol.

There was no sign in the interview that the CIA was sticking to its original last—the gathering of information about what other nations might have up their sleeves. There was every indication that the agency intends to go on having a policy role in American foreign affairs, pressing its "operational" views on the Executive and acting on them, with or without permission from above. The rest of the world may well conclude from what Turner did and did not say that the United States will go on maintaining dirty-trick squads and assassination professionals in the style we used to think belonged to despotisms alone.

If President Carter really means to bring the intelligence agencies to heel, he will have learned from the performance of Admiral Turner on *Face the Nation* that there is a long way to go before he can count on their observing the decencies of a free society.